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# Annual Old Testament Literature Survey (1999)

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There are plenty of helps these days for preachers and students to carefully exegete and expound the Old Testament text. Only books which have appeared in the last two years are included in this survey.

We begin by drawing attention to two unique dictionaries. The first is the **New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis** under the general editorship of **WA Van GEMEREN** and published in the UK by **Paternoster Press, 1997** in five volumes. It contains four parts. Part one is a guide to Old Testament Theology and Exegesis and includes articles on textual criticism, the canon, history, literature, biblical theology and hermeneutics. Part two, the bulk of the work, provides a very useful Hebrew lexicon and topical dictionary. Volume five contains the final two parts which comprise an integrated cross-reference system and indices. The work enables those with no knowledge of Hebrew to use all the material to good advantage. At the close of each entry and article there is an up-to-date bibliography. Each book of the Old Testament is considered from a theological perspective. Overall this is a very useful and satisfying resource for ministers and Bible students and, dare I say, excels its New Testament counterpart.

Secondly, there is the massive one-volume **Dictionary of Biblical Imagery** published by **IVP (USA/UK), 1998**. The general editors are **Leland RYKEN, James WILHOIT, and Tremper LONGMAN III**. Biblical and literary scholars were involved in the production with quite a number of contributions from the United Kingdom. As the subtitle explains, the dictionary is "an encyclopedic exploration of the images, symbols, motifs, metaphors, figures of speech and literary patterns of the Bible". The topics covered immediately distinguish this from other Bible dictionaries. For instance, there are articles on "Cheat the Oracle", "Domineering Mother, Wife", "Gestures", "Lying Prostrate", "Refuser of Festivities", "Sibling Rivalry" and "Well, Meeting at the". The dictionary also draws attention to the imagery, rhetorical features and literary devices in each book of the Bible. Surprisingly, there is neither an article on "preacher" or "preaching" nor any reference to it under other headings. The nearest it gets, are two sentences on the "Herald" under the general subject of "Authority". There are 26 columns of text on "Jesus, Images of" and over 13 columns given to an essay on "Rhetorical Patterns". A fascinating introduction includes a list of archetypes of ideal experience and their opposites and closes with an exhaustive index of biblical references followed by a subject index. The book is aimed primarily not at "scholars but laypeople".

Two books on Old Testament subjects have recently been published by Apollos (an imprint of IVP) in the "New Studies in Biblical Theology" series, edited by DA Carson. Number 4 in the series is **Daniel J ESTES, Hear, My Son. Teaching and learning in Proverbs 1-9, 1997**. The author expounds some of the leading themes in

the first main part of this neglected book of Proverbs. His main goal, however, is to show what it says and implies about education. It will, for this reason, be of special interest to teachers and parents.

The sixth monograph in the series is by **J Gary MILLAR, Now Choose Life. Theology and ethics in Deuteronomy, 1998.** This scholarly work started life as an Oxford DPhil. thesis. Against the background of the theology of Deuteronomy, Millar handles the ethical teaching in a fresh and careful way. The author's preface reveals his pastoral concern: "It is my conviction of the relevance of Deuteronomy for the church that has brought me back to it again and again, and while I hope that this book makes some small contribution to the critical study of Deuteronomy, my greater burden is that it might enable some pastors and teachers to bring its vibrant message to bear on churches and communities in a new and more relevant way."

A number of evangelical commentaries have seen the light of day in the last couple of years.

For the early part of Genesis there is **Douglas F KELLY, Creation and Change. Mentor (Christian Focus), 1997.** As the subtitle indicates this commentary has a specific purpose of expounding "Genesis 1:1-2:4 in the light of changing scientific paradigms". There is a wealth of information and a wide range of apt quotations, from the Early Church Fathers to modern day writers. He uses the latest scientific knowledge to counteract those who use science to reject the biblical account. Dr Kelly unashamedly and persuasively argues for a literal interpretation of the account of creation in Genesis 1. He engages at length with proponents of the "Framework Hypothesis" such as Meredith Kline and Henri Blocher. His discussion of Hebrew words will need to be supplemented with the comments of Wenham and Young. Kelly is sometimes too dependent on Cassuto the Jewish commentator. The final chapter considers the Sabbath and presents a good case for Christians observing it on the first day of the week.

Also under the **Mentor** imprint three full-length, hardback commentaries have recently appeared. **Amos** by **Gray SMITH, 1998** exegetes the text in such a way as to emphasise the theological significance of the book. **Psalms** by **Allan HARMAN, 1998** brings together a lifetime's work of study and teaching on the Book of Psalms. The introduction is particularly helpful, covering such items as the development of the psalter, types of psalms, the problem psalms, the messianic element and the use of the psalms today. This is followed by sound and illuminating comments on each psalm drawing out their abiding significance. Detailed textual and exegetical difficulties are not undertaken. **Richard L Pratt on 1 and 2 Chronicles, 1998** makes good use of the scholarly work on these books that has been produced over the last twenty years. Besides dealing with authorship, date, historical and theological purposes, translation and transmission of the text, the introduction sets out twenty eight major themes detected in Chronicles. The commentary continually refers back to these themes. In this way the distinctive nature of the Chronicler's work is brought to our attention. It seems to be the policy of the publishers not to provide footnotes or to mention the names of other scholars or commentators. The commentary on Chronicles does not even offer further help toward the study of these books. This is surprising in works aimed primarily at Bible College and seminary students and pastors. All three

commentaries in this new series are very readable and are highly recommended but the price may be off-putting to some.

**Focus on the Bible** from **Christian Focus** has recently produced **Judges and Ruth** by **Stephen DRAY, 1997** and **Daniel** by **Robert FYALL, 1998**. These commentaries are intended as more popular aids to the study of God's Word. They seek to communicate the truth in a clear and relevant way without being technical. Too many expositors of Old Testament books have tended to indulge in fanciful spiritualization instead of allowing the message of the books themselves to speak to our situation. That cannot be said of these authors. At the end of each chapter there are questions for further thought. In the case of **Daniel** the format has changed allowing for more comment.

The **Welwyn Commentary Series** published by **Evangelical Press** have added **A Family Tree, 1 Chronicles** by **Andrew STEWART**. The commentary explains the text with apt illustrations and will provide a sure guide to Christians in their daily devotions. Pastors and scholars will need to look elsewhere for a detailed study of the text and problem passages. There are no endnotes or references to other commentaries. The Evangelical Press are also responsible for publishing **Roger ELLSWORTH, He Is Altogether Lovely. Discovering Christ in The Song of Solomon, 1998**. It is not a commentary on the text but it is an antidote to those who can see only sex in this book of the Bible.

Recent additions to the **The New International Commentary on the Old Testament** series include **John N OSWALT The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66 Eerdmans 1998**. The first part of Oswalt's work was published in 1986 before Motyer's commentary on Isaiah appeared. This second part has been eagerly awaited. The layout and binding of this new book is certainly more user friendly than the earlier volumes in the series. There is not very much to choose between Oswalt and Motyer for they are both thorough in their treatment of the text and very soundly and warmly evangelical. The whole prophecy is considered to be the work of Isaiah of Jerusalem in the eighth century before Christ. Oswalt generally has more detail than Motyer but in some places the latter is theologically richer. The premillennialism of Oswalt peeps through in 65:17. It was disappointing to see Oswalt accepting too readily the translation "startle" in place of "sprinkle" in 52:15. Nevertheless, this is a most useful work and it will certainly encourage preachers in their sermon preparations as well as provide a good guide to students.

In the same series, **Tremper LONGMAN III** comments on **The Book of Ecclesiastes, Eerdmans 1998**. This is a disappointing work. He believes that the body of the book is a piece of pessimistic writing "out of sorts" with the rest of the Old Testament. Qoheleth's (the Preacher's) speech "is a foil, a teaching device" used by the author of the final verses to instruct his son "concerning the dangers of speculative, doubting wisdom in Israel". These conclusions arise out of a failure to understand the key word. If "vanity" means "meaninglessness" then these kinds of conclusions are to be expected. Longman is forced to reinterpret the positive statements within the book in a way that supports his negative view of Qoheleth. His efforts are unconvincing. He fails to interpret the term "vanity" in the light of its use in similar passages throughout Scripture. It is clear from both Old and New Testaments that, for believer and unbeliever alike, life in this world is a mere breath. It is fleeting, frustrating and

unsubstantial. We all experience the curse of Genesis 3. It is not ungodly pessimism but biblical realism to admit that we live in such a world. This is what the Preacher, in his own inimitable way, shocks us all into seeing.

Finally, in the NICOT series, there is the massive two-part study of **The Book of Ezekiel**, Eerdmans 1997 and 1999 by Daniel I BLOCK. In addition to a detailed study of the text, theological implications and reflections appear at the end of each section. Concerning Ezekiel's future pronouncements, Block writes: "while the NT often recognizes fresh significances in its reading of OT texts (the church is heir to the spiritual promises of God to Israel), Ezekiel's own understanding of his oracles must be determinative in our interpretation."

It is the object of IVP's **The Bible Speaks Today** series to expound the text accurately and to apply its message to our own situations in a readable way. The latest additions are no exceptions. They are **The Message of Nehemiah, God's servant in a time of change** by Raymond BROWN, 1998 and **The Message of Joel, Micah & Habakkuk, Listening to the voice of God** by David PRIOR, 1998.

It is always helpful and often challenging to read good sermons on Old Testament texts. There are not many available by modern preachers but the following are highly recommended.

Two books of Martyn LLOYD-JONES' sermons on Isaiah have appeared which provide excellent examples of evangelistic preaching that is both faithful to the text and powerfully applicable to the present situation. One is **A Nation Under Wrath, Isaiah 5 speaks to us today**, Kingsway, 1997. The other is **God's Way Not Ours, Sermons on Isaiah 1:1-18, The Banner of Truth Trust**, 1998. They were preached in 1963/64 but reading them you would think they had been delivered last Sunday. These sermons show how the prophet's word to Israel can be legitimately applied to the whole human race.

There are more sermons by LLOYD-JONES in the booklet **True Happiness, an Exposition of Psalm One**, Bryntirion Press (formerly Evangelical Press of Wales), 1997. Also published by the same press are the morning addresses which Geoffrey THOMAS gave at the Aberystwyth Conference under the title **Daniel, servant of God under four kings**, 1998. These books are both challenging and encouraging.

Finally, two more volumes of sermons by Roy CLEMENTS have been produced by IVP. **Practising faith in a pagan world** appeared in 1997. It consists of a series of ten sermons from the prophecies of Ezekiel and Daniel. The author shows how the church in the western world is in a kind of "exile" situation. These sermons provide help to Christians seeking to live the life of faith in a pagan, antichristian society. **People who made history**, 1998 takes us through the books of Judges and Ruth. Again, the relevance of the Scriptures to our own situation today is presented in a compelling way with helpful illustrations. The author is sensitive to the flow of redemptive history while also drawing out lessons from the lives of the individual men and women mentioned in the text.

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